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Sent: Thur 7/12/2012 9:59:24 PM
Subject: [WQ News] Wyoming launches cistern program for Pavillion area
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What good are cisterns if it rarely rains????? Guess they should be grateful they are not in CO.

Wyoming launches cistern program for Pavillion area

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press writer | Posted: Thursday, July 12, 2012 6:00 am

CHEYENNE — The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality has begun signing up Pavillion-area residents who want fresh drinking water trucked to their homes to replace contaminated well water that might have gotten that way because of gas development.

The state is preparing to install cisterns for as many as 35 households around the central Wyoming gas field where the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency theorized in a report last year that hydraulic fracturing might have played a role in the contamination.

As of Wednesday, seven households had expressed interest, according to Karen Halvorsen, storage tank program manager for the Department of Environmental Quality.

The Legislature has appropriated \$750,000 to install the cisterns. Households won't pay for the cisterns but will have to pay for the trucked-in water from the Pavillion municipal system.

Their monthly water bill has yet to be determined — it will depend in part on how many people participate and how much water they use — but a report last August for the Wyoming Water Development Commission estimated \$250 a month.

Too much, said Jeff Locker, a farmer who lives about six miles east of Pavillion.

"We really considered it, but the monthly cost on it is prohibitive," Locker said. "We'd be looking at close to \$500 a month for our water, and that's pretty prohibitive for us."

As it is, he uses a reverse-osmosis system to clean his well water sufficiently to use for washing and bathing. The expense of filters, electricity and other costs for the system add up to a couple hundred dollars a month, he said.

Even then, the reverse-osmosis system doesn't remove hydrocarbons, he said.

"You take the lid off the tank, it smells pretty gassy," he said, adding that he has heeded public officials' warnings to vent his bathroom while showering.

The deadline for homeowners to sign up to receive cisterns is Aug. 15. The size and cost of the cisterns and who will build them will be determined after that, Department of Environmental Quality spokesman Keith Guille said.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, involves pumping water, sand and chemicals underground to split open oil and gas deposits. State officials remain skeptical of the EPA's preliminary findings but separately from investigating the pollution's cause have spent well over a year considering options for providing clean

water to rural Pavillion residents.

The cistern plan was among the least expensive options in the report for the water development commission. Others, such as piping in water from a new well (\$680 per month) and building a plant to treat nearby lake water and pipe it to homeowners (\$1,225 per month) ran much higher.

Locker said the owner of the Pavillion gas field, Calgary-based Encana, should pay for clean water if the company caused the pollution. Encana spokesman Doug Hock said the water has been polluted for decades — long before Encana arrived on the scene in 2004.

“At this point we see nothing from what’s in the draft report that indicates our operations are responsible for the water issues out there,” Hock said. “Until there is something — data — that truly indicates our operations are at fault we have no intent of being involved in a long-term solution.”

Fracking didn’t cause the pollution, he said.

Additional households besides the 35 in the Pavillion area could get cisterns, too, if testing showed that their groundwater is contaminated, said Gov. Mead’s spokesman, Renny MacKay.

“Some of the people who live in this area have problems with their drinking water, while others are being impacted by the perception about their water quality,” Mead said in a statement. “I am glad this project is up and running.”

A new round of groundwater testing involving the EPA, Wyoming, U.S. Geological Survey and two American Indian tribes began in the Pavillion area this spring. Results are expected this fall.

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